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ABSTRACT

The specific aim of the present study is to examine children's metalinguistic awareness of one aspect of pragmatics: the request function. This function was selected for study because it is one of the earliest language functions to appear and because it has been the object of both theoretical and empirical research. Fourteen normal English-speaking middle-class Caucasian children 5 to 8 years of age participated in the study. Each child was tested individually at home by one female experimenter. Children's metapragmatic knowledge of the request function was explored with three tasks concerning production, comprehension, and reflection. The metaproduction task involved a role-playing activity with dolls in which requests were elicited in an imaginary classroom. The metacomprehension task involved eliciting judgments of the appropriateness of requests in hypothetical classroom situations. The reflection task consisted of an open-ended interview which provided subjects an opportunity to talk about the use of requests in the classroom. Results showed effects for age of child and type of request. In comparison with younger children, older children were more likely to produce indirect requests, judge a request as inappropriate in a particular classroom situation, and refer to pragmatic violation as the basis for judgment. Requests for action were found to take indirect forms, while requests for information more often took direct forms. (Author/RH)

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Program Report 83-2

Language in the Classroom: Metapragmatic Knowledge of School-Age Children

by Louise Cherry Wilkinson, Francesca Spinelli, Alex Cherry Wilkinson, and Chiang Chi Pang

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Wisconsin Center for Education Research
an institute for the study of diversity in schooling

Program Report 83-2

LANGUAGE IN THE CLASSROOM: METAPRAGMATIC KNOWLEDGE OF SCHOOL-AGE CHILDREN

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Francesca Spinelli

Alex Cherry Wilkinson

Chiang Chi Pang

A Report from the Program on
Student Diversity and Classroom Processes:
Interaction and Organization

Wisconsin Center for Education Research
University of Wisconsin
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Abstract

The metapragmatic knowledge of 14 children, 5 - 8 years, was examined in three ways. Requests were elicited through role-playing in hypothetical classrooms. Judgments of the appropriateness of requests were also elicited. Finally, an interview consisted of questions regarding use of language, particularly requests, in the classroom. The results showed effects for age of child and type of request. Older, in comparison with younger children, were more likely to: produce indirect requests, judge a request as inappropriate in a particular classroom situation, and refer to pragmatic violation as the basis of judgment. Requests for action took indirect forms, while requests for information took direct forms.

Introduction

Language development consists of two related but distinct dimensions, basic language skills and metalinguistic awareness, and it involves multiple levels of linguistic forms and functions, including the rules of phonology, syntax, semantics, and pragmatics. This article concerns metalinguistic awareness and pragmatics. Metalinguistic awareness is the ability to reflect on language itself as an object of knowledge, while basic language skills are comprehension and production. Pragmatics refers to the rules and social conventions used to communicate in social situations.

The specific aim of the present study was to examine children's metalinguistic awareness of one aspect of pragmatics: the request function. This function was chosen because it is one of the earliest language functions to appear, and because it has been the object of both theory and empirical research. In the present study, several new measures were devised to investigate school-age children's metapragmatic knowledge of the use of requests in the classroom.

The development of metalinguistic awareness

Children's metalinguistic knowledge develops with age (Saywitz & Wilkinson, 1982; Van Kleeck, in press), and it comes after the development of language use (Hirsh-Pasek, Gleitman, & Gleitman, 1978). A full awareness of language structure, as measured by multiple tasks, is not found until 7 or 8 years, even though primitive types of metalinguistic awareness are evident as early as 2 years (Cherry, 1979; Clark, 1978). Children are able to focus on language as an object and manifest this skill in a variety of tasks once they

have entered school. In contrast, during the preschool period, children are unable to focus on language divorced from its communicative function. The metalinguistic skills that emerge during this period focus on the communicative success of messages, rather than on the language itself (Van Kleeck, in press). In general, the findings concerning emergence of metalinguistic awareness are in accord with the view that the child's metacognitive abilities are limited and fragile during the preschool years, and that they become extensive and durable after the child enters school (Brown, Bransford, Ferrara, & Campione, in press; Gleitman, Gleitman & Shipley, 1972; Van Kleeck, in press).

Rules of requests

Of course, children speak correctly and communicate effectively before they are consciously aware of the language rules that they employ. Ultimately, they develop metalinguistic awareness and the capacity to articulate some of these rules. For example, some effort is expended by teachers in elementary schools to teach children to be aware of the rules of grammar that the children routinely employ in production and comprehension of language (e.g. parts of speech, sentence diagramming). Thus one cannot assume that the rules that are functionally important in children's use of language are necessarily available to their verbal report.

Some pragmatic rules that are used in successful communication have been defined by linguists. Labov and Fanshel (1977) have formulated a general Rule of Requests that specifies the conditions under which a listener will understand a speaker's utterance as a request for action. These conditions are a need for the action, a need for the request, ability of the listener to

comply, obligation or willingness of the listener to comply, and the right of the speaker to make the request. Labov and Fanshel believe that the direct imperative form underlies all requests for action (e.g. "Give me the book"). While the underlying form is imperative, the surface form need not be. Thus Labov and Fanshel formulated a Rule for Indirect Requests by which a request for action is conveyed without use of the direct imperative form. Indirect requests are accomplished by reference to one or more of the conditions of the Rule of Requests, as well as by reference to the existential status of the action, and the consequences or time of performing the action. For example, an indirect request can be made by referring to the condition of ability, as in the following: "Can you pick her up at the station?" Even though there is no direct imperative form, the intention of the request for action is expressed. Similarly, by saying, "I'm hungry," a speaker makes a reference to the first condition, the need for the action, which in this case would be interpreted as a request that the listener take action to alleviate the speaker's hunger.

Requests for information are used by speakers who want to obtain information from listeners. Labov and Fanshel (1977) believe that requests for information are related closely to requests for action. In the latter type of requests, the speaker may say, "Give me X," while in the former, the speaker may say "Give me information about X." In formulating the Rule of Requests for Information, Labov and Fanshel maintain that two conditions are true for all valid and sincere requests for information: the speaker believes that the listener has the information requested, and the speaker does not have that information.

In adult conversations, requests for action and information typically do not take direct, interrogative forms, such as the wh-, yes/no, or tag question forms, or the imperative form. Labov and Fanshel (1977) maintain that indirect requests are used frequently because they can be mitigated or aggravated. Mitigation refers to softening the tone or phrasing of requests to avoid creating offense, while aggravation refers to increasing the force of the request, such as by repeating the same request in the same way several times. Mitigation is crucial for maintaining smooth social interaction, since mitigated requests often allow the listener more options for response than compliance with the request. Aggravated requests, which often take a direct form, do not offer the listener a choice of responses in compliance.

Children's metalinguistic knowledge of requests

In general, most research on metalinguistic development has focused on children's understanding of the rules that relate to language forms, phonology, grammar, and semantics. With the exception of a study by Mitchell-Kernan and Kernan (1977), no studies have examined school-age children's metapragmatic knowledge of the request function of language. A few studies of preschool children have employed tasks that elicit both production and judgments of requests (Bates, 1976; Jacobs, cited in Ervin-Tripp, 1977; Read & Cherry, 1978). The data from these studies suggest effects of both age of the child and type of request.

Several researchers have used elicitation tasks to examine preschool children's production of requests. Read and Cherry (1978) studied 2-, 3-, and 4-year-olds' requests for objects to a "Cookie Monster" puppet. Their data showed younger children tended to use gestures as a part of their requests,

while older children used syntactic forms such as embedded imperatives to express differentiation among requests. Bates (1976) examined 2- to 6-year-olds use of requests for candy from an elderly, female puppet. The older children used more polite requests and showed a greater variety of ways to change their requests when asked to "try again." All of the children were able to increase the politeness of their requests the second time. James (1975) studied 4- and 5-year-old children's use of requests to different kinds of dolls: a same-sexed peer, a younger female, an adult male. Older children were less likely to use direct imperative forms than were younger children. All of the children used more direct forms with the younger child doll than with the adult and peer dolls. Mitchell-Kernan and Kernan (1977) used a role-playing task to elicit requests for action/object with black American children aged 7 to 12 years and found few age-related changes. The children's spontaneous speech was characterized by less direct forms in comparison with their speech in the role-playing situation.

Only two studies have employed a judgment task to examine young children's knowledge of pragmatic rules of requests. Jacobs (cited in Ervin-Tripp, 1977) asked 5-year-olds to judge the appropriateness of specific request forms and to select the probable listeners of different forms. Her data show that children differentiated listeners according to age status (adult versus child) and familiarity (familiar versus unfamiliar). Bates (1976) asked children 2 to 6 years to compare and choose between the politeness of the requests produced by two puppets to an elderly, female puppet. The children were also asked to explain their choices. The data show that 2-year-olds chose "please" as the most polite form; the 4-year-olds chose soft intonation; and the 6-year-olds chose conditional verb tenses and formal

address forms as the most polite forms. In addition, the older children were able to provide linguistic explanations of their choices, while the young children were unable to give satisfactory reasons for their judgments.

In sum, the data show that older preschool children produce more variable, indirect, and complex requests, in comparison with younger preschool children. The type of request (action/information) affects preschool children's production and judgment of requests. Older preschool children provide linguistically based explanations of their judgments, while young preschool seem unable to provide adequate explanations for their choices.

Methods for the study of metalinguistic knowledge

Many of the extant studies have employed a single task to assess metalinguistic awareness. Use of but one task can provide a limited view of children's knowledge. Clark (1978) has suggested that there are numerous levels of metalinguistic knowledge, and that multiple methods of assessment are necessary for a comprehensive understanding of metalinguistic development.

In all, four kinds of tasks have been used to examine children's metalinguistic awareness: production, comprehension, reflection, and inference. Metaproduction tasks most typically elicit behavior in conditions that resemble "real-life" situations in which the behavior typically occurs. The metaproduction tasks are less concrete than simple production tasks. They often involve imaginary settings and provide less internal motivation for communication. This type of task was used by de Villiers and de Villiers (1974); they requested subjects to repair inappropriate, unacceptable, or inadequate statements of puppets.

Metacomprehension tasks are less concrete than the metaproduction tasks. Judgment tasks are most often used, in which the subject is required to evaluate the behavior produced by another speaker along dimensions such as accuracy, well-formedness, and appropriateness, among others. For example, Bates (1976) asked her subjects to evaluate the politeness of the speech generated by puppets to an elderly female puppet.

In a third type of task, the subjects are required to reflect about the behavior under study and to provide information about their own internal processing of it. Both this reflection task, and the fourth type of task, which involves the experimenter making inferences about the subject's internal psychological state, have been more commonly used in assessments of metacognitive abilities, not specifically concerned with language (e.g. Meichenbaum & Butler, 1980; Sternberg, Conway, Ketron, & Bernstein, 1981).

In the present study, school-age children's metapragmatic knowledge of the request function was explored with three tasks: production, comprehension, and reflection. The metaproduction task involved a role-playing activity with dolls, where requests were elicited in an imaginary classroom. The metacomprehension task involved eliciting judgments of the appropriateness of requests in hypothetical classroom situations. Explanations of the reasons for the judgment were also elicited. The reflection task consisted of an open-ended interview, which provided subjects an opportunity to talk about the use of requests in the classroom.

Methods

Subjects

Fourteen normal English-speaking middle-class Caucasian children aged 5 to 8 years participated in the study. There were nine males and five females, of whom six were in kindergarten, two in first grade, four in second grade, and two in third grade.

Data collection

Each child was tested individually at home by one female experimenter. All tasks were audiotaped.

Prior to administering the tasks, the experimenter conversed with the child for several minutes and briefly explained the activities that would follow, including the three tasks: production, judgment, and interview. The interview was administered first for all subjects, because pilot testing showed that rapport between the experimenter and the subject could best be established early in the testing session with the interview. The remaining tasks were administered in a counterbalanced order for the subjects.

The interview consisted of 12 questions (see Appendix) concerning the use of language and specifically the use of requests in the classroom. The questions were paraphrased if the subjects did not respond appropriately or requested clarification. Subjects were asked to expand their responses occasionally, with prompts such as "Can you tell me more?" "What's cool talking?" Can you show me?"

Each of the remaining tasks contained two types of requests for information, procedures and academic information, and one type of request for

action. Each task also contained one segment for a student-listener and one for a teacher-listener.

The judgment task required subjects to evaluate the appropriateness of various requests. The subject was shown a picture of two students seated at a table in a classroom and a picture of a student seated at the table with a teacher standing beside him/her. The experimenter described a scenario about one of the students at the table, who needed directions for a worksheet, a pencil, and help spelling a word. The subjects were required to judge the adequacy of five requests directed to another student-listener, and of the same requests directed to a teacher-listener for each of the three types of requests (procedures, academic information, action).

> "This is Pat." (Show picture of student sitting at a table with a pencil and paper in front of her/him.) "S/he just got back from the library and missed the instructions on how to do the worksheet. So s/he needs some help. You will hear some ways that Pat asks her/his classmate Chris and a teacher, Mrs. Jackson, for help. I want you to tell me if you think that that is a good way to ask for help."
>
> (Show picture of a teacher-listener or student-listener standing beside Pat.) Pat will ask each of the following to the teacher-listener and the student-listener:
>
> (1) How do I do this page?
>
> (2) Can you tell me how to do this page, please?
>
> (3) I missed the instructions for the worksheet.
>
> (4) You tell me how to do this worksheet right now.
>
> (5) How do I do this page? I don't know because I was at the library.

(For each segment ask): "Was that a good way to ask for help from _____?" (If the child responds "no" ask): "Why not?" followed by "What would be a better way to ask?

The requests were produced by a tape-recording of either a male child's voice or a female child's voice. If the subject judged a request as inappropriate, then the subject was asked to provide an explanation.

The production task consisted of two scripted narratives about a student who needed help with worksheet procedures, academic content, and a colored marker, all of which the student in the script needed to complete the assigned work. In one script, the student directed requests to a teacher, and in the other script, the student directed requests to another student. The experimenter related the narrative to the subject, stopping at various points in the script to give the subject an opportunity to produce the appropriate request. Props used with the narrative included wooden dolls to represent the actors in the script, markers, and worksheets.

E: "We're going to act out a story with dolls. Let's pretend this is Tony (Toni). S/he is a kindergarten/first/second/third grader, and this is a kindergarten/first/second/third grade teacher. The children in Tony's class are supposed to do this worksheet. Pretend that Tony is at the school library and is not in the room. The teacher is going to tell the class what to do. She says, 'Find the pictures that go together. Draw a circle around them. Use an orange marker.' The first picture is some potato chips. The

second is lemonade with a straw. And the last is a cake. Now Tony comes in. The teacher gives Tony a worksheet. Tony doesn't know what to do. How can s/he find out what to do?

S: (Ask the teacher)

E: "Ok, show me a good way for Tony to ask the teacher for help."

S: (Asks teacher what to do)

E: (Repeats instructions)

E: "Pretend that Tony needs an orange marker. Show me what s/he would do."

S: (Asks teacher)

E: "Pretend that Tony doesn't know which pictures go together. What would Tony say to get help from the teacher?"

S: (Asks teacher)

E: "Pretend that Tony doesn't know the next answer either. Make her/him get help."

S: (Asks teacher)

Data analysis

All of the data were transcribed by the experimenter within 48 hours of collection. The data base consisted of 14 sets of responses to the 12 questions in the interview; 330 judgments; 165 explanations; 272 requests.

Different coding systems were employed with the different kinds of data. The subjects' responses to the questions in the interview were analyzed qualitatively, without statistical tests.

The subjects' judgments were first separated into judgments of appropriateness and of inappropriateness. Secondly, the explanations given for judgments of inappropriateness were coded for adequacy. Inadequate explanations included no explanation, "because" standing alone or non-completion, an example of a different request, and an explanation irrelevant to the dimension of appropriateness (e.g. "It's too sad"). Adequate explanations included the following: those with evaluative content (e.g. "That was bad"); with formal violation (e.g. "No please"); with pragmatic violation (e.g. too direct); with pragmatic violation in the nonverbal domain (e.g. the observation that one does not just take material but has to request it; this only applies to the request for materials).

The requests produced by the subjects were coded according to the indirectness of the form employed in the request. Indirect requests were defined as those that contained a declarative statement with the intent of eliciting a response, or an embedded request with or without "please (questions or modal verb)." Direct requests were defined as those that included the direct syntactic form for the request (e.g. the imperative of the Wh- question), or a request for confirmation. "Please" appended to the direct form did not alter coding.

Results

The Interview

Data from the interviews will be summarized qualitatively. The purpose of this analysis is to provide preliminary evidence for the metapragmatic knowledge that was assessed in the two experimental tasks. All of the subjects responded appropriately to the interview, although the experimenter paraphrased and used prompts on occasion.

Questions four and eight referred to the differential effectiveness of types of requests in eliciting help or materials. Almost all of the subjects agreed with this proposition; however the tendency was more pronounced for the older subjects (100% versus 85%). Questions five, six, nine, and ten required the subjects to provide examples of "good" and "bad" requests. Older subjects emphasized the use of "please"; younger subjects most often used a modal verb or other form with "please," however. Both younger and older subjects emphasized the use of indirect forms when requesting materials. For example, some of the younger children used "please" often with qualifiers as in the following: "Could I please borrow the book just for a second?" Several younger subjects suggested that "Just taking it" was a "bad" way to request an object, while several older subjects mentioned that saying "I got it first" qualified as a "bad" way. Both groups mentioned direct requests as impolite. Questions one, two, and 12 concerned politeness and "good" versus "bad" speakers. Half of the younger subjects' descriptions consisted of evaluative terms such as "nice," "cool," and "mean," while the older subjects seldom used terms such as these to differentiate between good and bad speakers. Another difference is that the younger subjects included friendliness as a

characteristic of good speakers (e.g. "a good talker would be somebody's friend"). Older children's descriptions of good speakers resembled Grice's (1975) notions of informativeness and cooperatives. Some examples include the following: "A good talker says it so people can understand it and it makes sense (Be clear)." "Don't say none of your business and get out of here (Be cooperative)." "A person who is not a good talker talks a lot (Be brief)." "A good talker talks if he knows a lot of work (Be informative)." Some of the older subjects referred to grammaticality, as in the following: "A good talker doesn't say ain't." Two additional responses from older subjects included references to the use of "thank you" and the use of a pleasant voice. One older subject mentioned not using "bad" words. All of the subjects emphasized politeness rather than informativeness in response to question 12, and they included evaluative references such as "Being some people's friends and liking them and being nice to them" as well as the use of "please" with the modal verb.

Question 3, which concerned appropriate times to talk at school, did not elicit differential responses between older and younger subjects; both reported a variety of academic and nonacademic activities. Older subjects were more likely to mention talking when called upon in class or needing help, compared with younger subjects. Questions 7 and 11 referred to the form of requests directed to teacher-listeners versus peer-listeners. All of the younger subjects indicated that the form would not differ, while about half of the older subjects said that it depended on the nature of the interaction.

In sum, the data from the interview provides ample evidence that young, school-age children possess metapragmatic awareness, and that this ability emerges and differentiates during the early school years. Younger children

emphasize affiliation in their view of "good" speakers, while older children conform more to adult (Gricean) notions of cooperativeness and informativeness. All of the subjects seem to be aware of some fundamental rules governing classroom language usage. They know that there are times to talk and not to talk at school and that different kinds of talking may be differentially effective. Both older and younger children seem to differentiate between the two types of requests, those for information and for objects/materials. Requests for materials should take an indirect, mitigated form, while requests for information may take both direct and indirect forms. Older children show a greater tendency to prefer the use of indirect forms, compared with younger children.

Production Task

Discriminant function analyses were performed on data from the production task. The independent variables in the analysis were Age (the linear trend), Information/Action (a dummy variable contrasting these two types of requests), Academic/Procedural (a dummy variable contrasting these two types of requests for information), Listener (Student/Teacher), and interactions of Age x Information/Action, Age x Academic/Procedural, Age x Listener, Listener x Information/Action, and Listener x Academic/Procedural. The dependent variable in one analysis was the classification of a response as direct/indirect. In a separate analysis, the dependent variable was the classification of indirect responses as modal, embedded + please, yes/no question, or declarative. The data were responses pooled over all children. Since each child contributed a number of responses, the observations were not independent, and the significance levels are not entirely trustworthy. One

solution to this problem is to select a statistic that measures the effect of interest, in this case the log of the F value, and to jackknife that statistic by individual children (Mosteller & Tukey, 1977). This method assesses the degree to which the effect estimated from the pooled data of all subjects persists when an individual subject is deleted from the analysis.

The upper part of Table 1 shows t statistics from the discriminant function and jackknifing analyses of the production task. The table shows only the effects that reached statistical significance in both types of analysis. For the production data, there were main effects for both Age and Information/Action, but no significant interaction. Tables 2 and 3 present the frequencies and percentages for the main effects.

Older subjects produced more indirect than direct requests, compared with younger subjects. All subjects were more likely to produce an indirect request when requesting action than when requesting information. A closer look at the data showed that the subjects used only one kind of direct form for all requests, either the wh-question for information or the imperative for action; there were no instances of requests for confirmation. In contrast, the subjects varied the kinds of indirect forms they used when producing requests, as shown by the analysis of type of indirectness.

The discriminant function and jackknifing analyses, presented in Table 1, showed that Age and Information/Action were both statistically significant. Tables 4 and 5 show the frequencies and proportions for these effects. It is evident that older subjects preferred to use an embedded request form plus "please," while youngest subjects preferred to use both the embedded plus "please" and the declarative form. In addition, the most common form for

Table 1

t Values for Discriminant Function Analyses and for Jackknifing Analyses

Variable		Type of Analysis: Pooled Discriminant Function t	Pooled Discriminant Function df	Jackknife t	Jackknife df
Production Task					
Indirectness	Age	5.44**	270	2.37*	13
	Information/ Action	2.68**	269	4.61**	13
Type of Indirectness	Age	2.70**	193	2.37*	13
	Information/ Action	2.13*	464	3.12*	13
Judgment Task					
Appropriateness	Age	3.83**	328	3.35**	10
Type of Explanation	Age	6.44**	161	6.42**	10
	Information/ Action	4.03**	320	4.70**	10

** $p \leq .01$

* $p \leq .05$

Table 2

Production Task: Effect of Age on Frequency of Direct and Indirect Requests

	Age			
Request	5	6	7	8
Direct	28(25%)	24(60%)	22(28%)	1(2%)
Indirect	87(75%)	16(40%)	56(72%)	38(98%)

Table 3

Production Task: Effect of What Was Requested on Frequency of Direct and Indirect Requests

	What Requested	
Request	Information	Action
Direct	75(100%)	0(0%)
Indirect	141(72%)	56(28%)

Table 4

Production Task: Effect of Age on the Frequency with Which Types of Indirect Requests were Produced

	Age			
Type of Indirect Request	5	6	7	8
Modal	9(10%)	5(31%)	3(5%)	5(13%)
Embedded + please	47(54%)	1(6%)	34(61%)	20(53%)
Yes/no question	0(0%)	1(6%)	8(14%)	7(18%)
Declarative	31(36%)	9(56%)	11(20%)	6(16%)

Table 5

Production Task: Effect of What was Requested on the Frequency with Which Types of Indirect Requests were Produced

	What Requested	
Type of Indirect Request	Information	Action
Modal	8(6%)	14(25%)
Embedded + please	7(5%)	29(52%)
Yes/no question	12(9%)	4(7%)
Declarative	48(34%)	9(16%)

requesting action was the embedded request plus please, while for requesting information the declarative was most common.

Judgment Task

For the judgment task, discriminant function and jackknifing analyses were performed as for the production task. The independent variables were the same, but the dependent variables were different. One dependent variable was the classification of a response as judged appropriate by the child or judged inappropriate. A second dependent variable was the classification of explanations given for judged inappropriateness (evaluative content, "please," pragmatic-verbal, pragmatic-nonverbal). Only explanations coded as adequate were included in the latter case. Results of these analyses are shown in the bottom part of Table 1.

Only Age emerged as a statistically significant and consistent main effect for judgment of appropriateness. Older subjects were more likely than younger subjects to judge any given request as inappropriate ("no"). Table 6 shows this effect, which represents a change in response bias over age. Although the linear trend in age is significant, there is some vascillation and the trend may have been attributable to a few of the 7-year-olds.

Explanations produced by the subjects in response to a judgment of inappropriateness exhibited significant main effects for Age and Information/Action (see Table 1). Inspection of the relevant frequencies, presented in Table 7, shows that older subjects were more likely to provide explanations that referred to pragmatic violations of the directness of the requests, while younger subjects were more likely to provide explanations that referred to "please" and evaluations of the content of the request. In

Table 6

Judgment Task: Effect of Age on the Frequency with Which Requests were Judged as Correct

	Age			
Judged as Correct	5	6	7	8
Yes	107(71%)	38(63%)	23(38%)	36(60%)
No	43(29%)	22(37%)	37(62%)	24(40%)

Table 7

Judgment Task: Effect of Age on the Frequency with Which Types of Explanation Occurred

	Age			
Type of Explanation	5	6	7	8
Evaluative content	6(5%)	4(18%)	6(21%)	6(27%)
"Please"	79(85%)	15(68%)	0(0%)	6(27%)
Pragmatic-verbal	0(0%)	0(0%)	18(65%)	7(32%)
Pragmatic-nonverbal	8(9%)	3(14%)	4(14%)	3(14%)

addition, as shown in Table 8, requests for information judged as inappropriate were likely to receive explanations that referred to "please," while requests for action that were judged as inappropriate were likely to receive explanations that referred to "please" and to their nonverbal pragmatic aspects.

Conclusion

In sum, the data show consistent differences for age of subjects. Older children were more likely to produce indirect requests, particularly of the indirect plus "please" type. They were also more likely to judge requests as inappropriate and to refer to a pragmatic violation as the justification for their judgment. Data from the production and judgment tasks were consistent with each other and with data from the interview. Thus, different methods converge on common conclusions.

These data also reveal a strong effect for the type of the request. Whether a request refers to information or action has a profound effect upon the form and judgment of appropriateness of the request. These results are consistent with sociolinguistic theory, which emphasizes that the form of request depends on whether the object of the request is action or information. Developmentally, it is remarkable that even the youngest children in our sample differentiated requests for action from requests for information. Metalinguistic awareness of this distinction seems to be an early acquisition, and it may serve as a starting point for metalinguistic development.

Table 8

Judgment Task: Effect of What Was Requested on the Frequency with Which Types of Explanation Occurred

	What Requested	
Type of Explanation	Information	Action
Evaluative content	16(15%)	6(11%)
"Please"	73(66%)	27(47%)
Pragmatic-verbal	19(18%)	6(11%)
Pragmatic-noverbal	0(0%)	18(32%)

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Appendix: Interview Questions

(1) If a person is a good talker how does (s)he talk?

(2) If a person is not a good talker how does (s)he talk?

(3) When do you talk at school?

Can you think of some more times when it is important for you to talk?

(4) Suppose someone in your class needs help with an assignment. Are some ways to ask for help better than other ways?

(5) What would be a good way to ask for help?

(6) What would be a bad way to ask for help?

(7) Suppose someone in your class needs help with an assignment. Would they ask a teacher for help in the same way that they would ask a classmate? (If no,) how would they be different?

(8) Suppose someone in your class wanted to borrow a book. Are some ways to get the book better than others?

(9) What would be a good way to try and get the book?

(10) What would be a bad way to try and get the book?

(11) Suppose someone in your class wanted to borrow a book. Would they ask a teacher in the same way that they would ask a classmate?

(If no,) how would the ways be different?

(12) What is polite talking?

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